## CONFIDENTIAL

PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION
(REVIEW OF REPORTS)

OF

BOSTON HARBOR, MASS.
(SHIRLEY GUT)

MASSACHUSETTS



AUTHORITY-THIS REPORT IS SUBMITTED IN COMPLIANCE WITH RESOLUTION, ADOPTED MAY 2,1939, BY THE COMMITTEE -ON COMMERCE OF THE UNITED STATES SENATE. U. S.ENGINEER OFFICE, BOSTON, MASS. AUGUST 17, 1940.

**COPY NO. 17** 

PUBLIC NOTICE RELATIVE TO PROPOSED IMPROVEMENT OF BOSTON HARBOR, MASSACHUSETTS.

WAR DEPARTMENT
THE BOARD OF ENGINEERS FOR RIVERS AND HARBORS
No. 2 New York Avenue, N.W.

Washington, D. C.

October 6, 1942

6542/10

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

By resolution adopted December 10, 1941, the Committee on Rivers and Harbors of the House of Representatives, United States, requested the Board of Engineers for Rivers and Harbors to review the reports on Boston Harbor, Massachusetts, printed in House Document Numbered 244, Seventy-second Congress, first session, with a view to determining if the existing project should be modified at the present time.

A report has been received from the Division Engineer recommending modification of the existing project for Boston Harbor, Massachusetts, to provide for extending and deepening certain channels in Boston Harbor.

After full consideration of the reports of the District and Division Engineers the Board of Engineers for Rivers and Harbors is not convinced of the advisability of the United States undertaking the improvement recommended by the Division Engineer.

All parties interested in the improvement are invited to submit, within a period of thirty days from the date of this notice, statements and arguments bearing upon the necessity for the improvement in the interests of commerce and navigation. Such statements should be addressed to "The Board of Engineers for Rivers and Harbors, No. 2 New York Avenue, N. W., Washington, D. C." Should a hearing be desired, this can be arranged by correspondence with the Board.

THE BOARD OF ENGINEERS FOR RIVERS AND HARBORS

## PUBLIC NOTICE RELATIVE TO PROPOSED IMPROVEMENT OF

SHIRLEY GUT, BOSTON HARBOR, MASSACHUSETTS

# WAR DEPARTMENT OFFICE OF DIVISION ENGINEER NORTH ATLANTIC DIVISION Room 1213, Federal Office Building, 90 Church St. NEW YORK, N. Y.

Boston Hbr. 1/181.4b

September 9, 1940

#### TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

- l. It has come to the notice of the undersighed that you have expressed an interest in the pending proposition for the improvement of Shirley Gut, Boston Harbor, Massachusetts. You are informed that the review of report thereon, authorized by a resolution adopted May 2, 1939, by the Committee on Commerce, United States Senate, has been submitted and is unfavorable to any improvement of Shirley Gut at this time. This adverse conclusion is based on the finding that the benefits to be expected from the desired reopening of Shirley Gut would not justify the large expenditure involved.
- 2. You are further notified that all interested parties have the privilege of an appeal from this conclusion to the Board of Engineers for Rivers and Harbors, a permanent body sitting at Washington, D. C., to which all examination and survey reports of this character are referred. Parties desiring to do so may be heard on appeal by the Board, either orally or in writing. Written communications should be addressed to the Board of Engineers for Rivers and Harbors, Munitions Building, Washington, D. C., and should be mailed in time to be in the possession of the said Board within four weeks from the date of this communication. If, however, you have important data to communicate to the Board, which cannot be collected and put in shape for proper presentation within four weeks, the Board should be informed of this fact without delay and request made for an extension of the limiting date for submitting information. If oral hearings are desired, dates for the same may be arranged for by correspondence with the Board.
- 3. Any further information needed may be obtained by application to the Division Engineer, or to the District Engineer, United States Engineer Office, 3d Floor, Park Square Building, 3l St. James Avenue, Boston. Massachusetts, but attention is invited to the following regulation as to the manner in which such information may be furnished:

"Where interested parties desire data necessary for the preparation of their appeal to the Board of Engineers for Rivers and Harbors, they will be afforded full opportunity to examine the copies of the reports of the District and Division Engineers in their respective offices, subject to the understanding that no part of the contents of these reports will be published in the newspapers or otherwise until the reports have been submitted to Congress. Topics of the reports will not be furnished or loaned for use outside of the office, but interested parties will be permitted to make such notes of the contents as they decire.

4. You are requested to communicate the foregoing to any persons known to you to be interested in the improvement and who, not being known to this office, do not receive a copy of this communication.

J. H. HODGES,

Colonel, Corps of Engineers, Division Engineer

# PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION (REVIEW OF REPORTS) OF BOSTON HARBOR (SHIRLEY GUT), MASSACHUSETTS

### Syllabus

The district engineer is of the opinion that the general benefits to navigation which would result from the desired improvement of Shirley Gut. Boston Harbor, Massachusetts, would not justify the large expenditure involved. A survey of the locality is not recommended.

War Department United States Engineer Office Boston, Massachusetts August 17, 1940

Subject: Preliminary examination (review of reports) of Boston Harbor (Shirley Gut). Massachusetts.

To: The Chief of Engineers, U. S. Army, through the Division Engineer, North Atlantic Division, New York, N. Y.

1. Authority. This report is submitted in compliance with the following resolution, adopted May 2, 1939, by the Committee on Commerce of the United States Senate:

RESOLVED BY THE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE OF THE UNITED STATES SENATE. That the Board of Engineers for Rivers and Harbors, created under Section 3 of the River and Harbor Act, approved June 13, 1902, be, and is hereby, requested to review the reports on Boston Harbor, Massachusetts, submitted in House Document Numbered 244. Seventy-second Congress. First Session, and subsequent reports, with a view to determining if any improvement at Shirley Gut is advisable at the present time.

2. Reports under review. The reports contained in House Document
No. 244, 72d Congress, 1st session, were not concerned with any improvement
in Shirley Gut. However, two subsequent reports have been submitted dealing
with improvements in this locality. In his report on preliminary examination

dated December 20, 1934, the Chief of Engineers recommended unfavorably on the improvement of Shirley Gut to provide a channel 100 feet wide, 14 feet deep at mean low water, and about 800 yards long, on the ground that the probable benefits would not justify the large expenditures involved. For similar reasons, the Chief of Engineers reported unfavorably on a 15-foot channel through Shirley Gut in his report on preliminary examination dated November 6, 1936. No action on the improvement of Shirley Gut has been taken by Congress.

3. Description .- Shirley Gut is the narrow, natural waterway which formerly connected the protected waters in the northern portion of Boston Harbor with the open waters of Broad Sound, and separated Deer Island from the tip of the mainland at Point Shirley in Winthrop. Gradual shoaling, caused by the action of heavy seas in Broad Sound, has built up a deposit across the Gut which now constitutes a barrier between those two bodies of water and, even at mean high tide, forms a land connection between Deer Island and the mainland. While this shoaling process has apparently proceeded at an accelerated rate in recent years, its progress on the whole has been decidedly gradual. An early map of Boston Harbor, made in 1788, indicates that at that time the waterway was about one-quarter mile wide. It was then known as "Pulling Point Gut", a name said to be derived from the fact that vessels proceeding through the Gut had to be landed and pulled along the shore against the swift tidal current which swept through the Gut at that time. On a later map, published in 1830, the passage was labeled "Shirley Gut" and showed a width of 600 or 700 feet. In 1860, the minimum channel width was about 240 feet between banks and the depth at mean low water was about 20 feet. In 1908, the controlling depth had decreased to about 10 feet, and a survey made by this office in 1931 showed a controlling depth of but 0.6 foot at mean low water. Subsequent surveys by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1934 and 1937 indicated continued shoaling. In the former year, shoaling had progressed to a point where the Gut was entirely bare at low water and even at high water was covered by an irregular belt less than 100 feet wide at its narrowest point,

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with depths of 1 to 5 feet at mean high tide. In 1937, the summit of the bar had been built up to 1 to 3 feet above mean high water, forming an unbroken land connection between Deer Island and Point Shirley, not less than 150 feet in width.

4. For a number of years prior to about 1937, the bar across Shirley

- 4. For a number of years prior to about 1937, the bar across Shirley Gut was used as a roadway at stages lower than half-tide. Since 1937, howover, this roadway has been used at all stages of the tide. The Gut is
  crossed by a sewer siphon approximately 8 feet in outside diameter, forming a
  part of the North Metropolitan Sewerage District system; by two water lines,
  12 inches and 8 inches in diameter; and by a submarine cable carrying wires
  of the New England Telephone and Telegraph Company. At its lowest point, the
  top of the sewer siphon is 18.5 feet below the plane of mean low water, while
  the 12-inch and 8-inch water pipes and the telephone cable are located 25
  feet, 15 feet and 12 feet, respectively, below that plane.
- 5. No bridge crosses Shirley Gut, nor are there any terminal or transfer facilities in the immediate vicinity. From 1899 to 1911, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts expended approximately \$1,900 in widening and deepening Shirley Gut to 6 feet at mean low water. At various times sand and gravel for commercial use have been dredged in the locality by private companies under Federal and State permits. No Federal project has ever been recommended or adopted for the improvement of Shirley Gut. The only prior reports on the waterway are those discussed in paragraph 2. The improvement under consideration would involve no questions of water power, flood control or other special subjects not discussed in this report.
- 6. The mean and spring ranges of tide at Shirley Gut are 9.5 and 11.0 feet, respectively. The locality is shown on U. S. Coast and Goodetic Survey Charts Nos. 246 and 1207, and on the map accompanying this report.
- 7. <u>Tributary area.</u>— North of Shirley Gut lies the town of Winthrop,
  Massachusetts, which in 1930 had a population of 16,852. Fort Banks, a
  United States Army reservation, is located in Winthrop, as are several small

manufacturing establishments, but the town is primarily a residential community forming part of Metropolitan Boston. Doer Island which lies southeast of Shirley Gut in the outer portion of Boston Harbor, is about a mile in length and a quarter-mile wide. A portion of the island is owned by the City of Boston which maintains thereon a penal institution known as the Suffelk County House of Correction. A number of fire control stations forming part of the system for military defense of Boston Harbor are also located on Deer Island. The sewer which crosses Shirley Gut extends the full length of the island and terminates in an outfall where it discharges into the harbor off the southeast tip of the island.

- Improvement desired. In order to afford local interests an opportun-8. ity to express their views with respect to the improvement of Shirley Gut, a public hearing was hold April 15, 1940, at Winthrop, Massachusetts. Oral and written statements were presented at the hearing by yachting and fishing intorosts; representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the City of Boston and the Town of Winthrop; transportation interests; the Boston Port Authority; the Maritime Association of the Boston Chamber of Commerce; the Coast Artillory, U. S. Army; the New England Telephone and Telegraph Company; and a number of interested individuals.
- 9. Local interests requested that Shirley Gut be restored to its former status as a navigable waterway by provision of a dredged channel 100 foot wide and 12 foot doop at mean low water. Some of the yearhting interests represented at the hearing indicated that a smaller channel, 8 feet deep and 55 feet wide, would be acceptable to them if the 12' x 100' improvement should fail to be adopted. Some of the proponents advocated provision of suitable jetties at the seaward end of the desired channel to provent shealing and to provide sholter for small vessels entering the Gut from rough seas in Broad Sound. Others suggested that jetties be provided only if their necessity should be indicated by careful observations subsequent to dredging of the channel. The town ongineor of Winthrop expressed the opinion that maintenance of a dredged

channel could be offected more cheaply by periodic dredging than by the construction of jetties.

a suitable channel in Shirley Gut could and would be used to advantage by pleasure craft, small fishing beats, firebeats, and small commercial vessels, such as tugs and oil barges. For vessels proceeding from Besten to Lynn, Salem, Marblehead, and other points on the North Shere, it was claimed, Shirley Gut would provide a shortened route which would save time and reduce operating costs. Use of the Gut, it was stated, would enable small beats to avoid the dangers inherent to small craft in navigating the main ship channels south of Door Island where they must centend with the heavy traffic and the strong wash caused by large ships entering and leaving Besten Harber. It was claimed that, since it would appreciably relieve congestion in those ship channels, especially on week-ends during the yachting season, diversion of small-beat traffic through Shirley Gut would constitute an important benefit to commercial shipping.

ll. Numorous rogattas sponsored by local yacht clubs were formerly raced ever a course in Broad Sound between Point Shirley and Nahant, but with Shirley Gut closed this is no longer practicable. Local yacht races are now held ever a course which extends from Winthrep toward Derchester Bay and takes contestants directly across the main ship channel of Boston Harber. With Shirley Gut open, it is claimed that these regattas would again be run on the Nahant course, resulting in safer conditions for competing beats and elimination of interference with commercial navigation. It was also suggested that an adequate channel in the Gut might be used to advantage by small naval vessels of the sub-chaser type.

12. Proponents of the improvement expressed the belief that opening of Shirley Gut would result in other important benefits in addition to these concerned with navigation. These include the reduction or elimination of cresion on Winthrep beaches; the abatement of pollution in the waters of these beaches,

new caused by sowage discharged into the harbor off Door Island; and the formation of a barrier of water to serve as protection to the people of Winthrep against immates attempting escape from the prison on Door Island.

13. Representatives of the City of Boston characterized the opening of Shirley Gut as an unwise and unnecessary expenditure of funds which would result in no commercial benefit. Opposition by the city was based principally on the fact that dredging of the desired channel would destroy the readway

Shirloy Gut as an unwise and unnecessary expenditure of funds which would result in no commercial benefit. Opposition by the city was based principally on the fact that dredging of the desired channel would destroy the readway upon which the Deer Island prison is entirely dependent for its police and fire protection, access to medical and hospital facilities on the mainland, and delivery of essential supplies, including fuel cil. If deprived of a readway across the Gut, access to the mainland by water would be necessary and this would involve major remains to the prison wharf, dredging of an appreach channel and berthing space, construction of storage tanks for cil, and other items which would necessitate an expenditure estimated by city efficials at \$150,000 to \$175,000. Other expenditures which would be necessitated by the desired improvement, according to city efficials, would be for construction of rotaining walls along the Deer Island shere of the channel, revision of water lines, and probable reconstruction of the sewer siphen and appurtenant structures in the vicinity of the Gut. In so far as the Deer Island prison is concerned, prevision of a suitable bridge over the desired channel at ne expense to the city would remove the principal objections upon which the city of Desten would otherwise base its apposition to the desired improvement.

14. A representative of the Coast Artillery, U. S. Army, stated that the Army considers a readway across Shirley Gut essential to the mevement of mebile artillery to Deer Island for the protection of the entrance to Besten Harber.

15. No definite offer was made by local interests to share the cost of the desired improvement. A representative of the New England Telephone and Telegraph Company stated that the company would take care of its submarine cable in connection with any dredging which might be done. The Chairman of the Board of Selectmen of Winthrep expressed willingness to put the matter of local

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cooperation before the voters of the town, and several statements of Winthrop citizens expressed confidence that the town would make some contribution.

Yachtsmen made similar favorable but indefinite statements with respect to a possible contribution by yachting interests. The Waterways Division of the Massachusetts Department of Public Works, which went on record at the hearing as neither favoring nor opposing the desired improvement, failed to make any offer of local cooperation on behalf of the Commonwealth.

- 16. Cormerce and vessel traffic. In fermer years, small commercial craft and pleasure vessels made considerable use of the passage through Shirley Gut. Now entirely blocked by a deposit of sand and gravel which rises above mean high water, there has been no navigation of any kind through the Gut in recent years. The prespective traffic upon which local interests base their request for the opening of this waterway consists of recreational craft, small fishing vessels, and tags and eil barges of mederate size. Pleasure beats likely to utilize a channel through the Gut would range from 18 to 50 feet in length and from 2 to 8 feet in draft. Statements made at the hearing listed 19 yacht clubs in Besten Harber with an enrellment of nearly 1,000 beats. It was estimated that on week-ends about 300 of these would use a channel in Shirley Gut on their way to points on the North Shere of Massachusetts Ray and that as many as 200 pleasure craft from North Shere points might enter Besten Harber by way of the Gut during regattas spensored by local clubs.
- 17. Small fishing boats which work out of Boston and might be expected to make extensive use of the Gut include vessels engaged in shore fishing, herring boats, and erab and lebster boats, aggregating about 100 in number. These vessels were described as ranging from 30 to 45 feet in length and up to about 5 feet in draft. Other commercial vessels which local interests claim would use the waterway include tugs, firebeats and oil barges requiring depths generally not less than 12 feet.
- 18. <u>Difficulties attending navigation</u>. Proponents of the desired improvement pointed out that, with Shirley Gut closed to navigation, recreational

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craft and small fishing and other commercial vessels are forced to enter and leave Boston Harbor by way of the main ship channels south of Deer Island. They claim that this route not only entails added running time and increased operating costs to vessels traveling between Boston and the North Shore, but also exposes small craft to the dangerous wash created by large vessels under way and adds to the congestion in the main ship channels, to the detriment of commercial shipping generally.

- 19. Shore-line changes. Erosion of boaches in the vicinity of Shirley Gut was discussed by several individuals present at the hearing. Erosion has apparently been most prenounced along the harber side of Point Shirley, north and west of the Gut. According to statements made by property owners, the shore in this vicinity has been severely attacked, particularly in recent years, necessitating substantial expenditures by ewners of shore property for the repair of seawalls. Local interests have advanced the opinion that the swift current which formerly swept through Shirley Gut tended to break up rough seas approaching this beach. With the Gut closed, they claim this protection is no longer available, and erosion of the beach has consequently progressed at an accolerated rate. With apparent reference to pertions of the Winthree beach which face Bread Sound, another statement made at the hearing indicated that the beach has gone down about one foot in recent years. This recession was also ascribed to the closure of Shirley Gut, which, it is maintained, has cut off the supply of sand which drifts up the coast.
- 20. Discussion. A drodged channel through Shirley Cut would constitute a convenient route to points on the North Shore of Massachusetts Bay, principally for pleasure beats quartered at the four yacht clubs in the vicinity of Winthrop. For the comparatively small number of pleasure beats based in upper Boston Harbor this route would be of less importance. At the higher stages of tide, vessels of small draft could probably at the present time save considerable distance by taking a general easterly course across Bird Island Flats and north of Governors Island to Shirley Gut. However, the existing harbor lines

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in the vicinity of East Bosten and Governors Island permit the filling of this area and it is the present plan of the City of Bosten eventually to fill it in connection with development of the Bosten Airport, which would close this route to navigation. For vessels of substantial draft, particularly at low tide, this course would not be practicable, and such vessels would necessarily keep to the main ship channel to a point beyond Governors Island Flats, then proceed north and east to the Gut. By way of the latter route to the Gut, the saving in distance, ever the route south of Door Island, would be relatively unimportant. Pleasure vessels based at points in the southern part of Bosten Harber, in Dorehester Bay, Quincy Bay, and Hingham Bay would have little incentive to use Shirley Gut as its use would necessitate crossing the main ship channel and would involve distances equal to, if not greater than, these traversed in using the main entrance channels.

21. Similar considerations apply to the fishing vessels and commercial craft which local intorests claim would use the desired channel. With favorablo tide, small fishing boats could follow a fairly direct course between the Fish Pier and Shirley Gut and to some extent such craft would probably bonofit by the shortened route afforded. This route, however, could be used only until development of the Boston Airport closes it to navigation. The largor fishing vossels and tugs, and oil barges drawing 12 feet or more, could not use this direct route but would have to keep in the main channel until clear of Governors Island Flats, then proceed north and east to the Gut. Approached by this loss direct route, a channel through Shirley Gut would shorten the sailing distance by only a small amount, and it is believed that few such vessels would use this circuitous and relatively restricted channel in proference to the open waters in the main entrance channels. With respect to the Besten fishing floot, it may be noted that the most important fishing grounds, Georges Bank and the Grand Banks of Nowfoundland, lie southeast and east of Boston, and for fishing vossels procooding to and from these areas the main channel provides a shorter and more convenient approach to Boston wharves than would a channol in Shirley Gut.

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22. In statements made at the hearing, repeated reference was made to the extremely strong currents which swept through Shirley Gut when the waterway was open as in former years. Proponents of the improvement not only expect these swift currents to reappear with the dredging of the Gut, but they also depend on them to effect a material abatement in pollution of local beaches and to form a barrier against the escape of prisoners in the Door Island penal institution. These benefits may be attained to some extent by virtue of the swift currents which may reasonably be expected to reappear if the Gut is dredged, but from the point of view of navigation, the existence of strong currents in the narrow channel contemplated would be distinctly objectionable. Whether the channel were dredged to a width of 55 feet as suggested by some of the spensors, or 100 feet as advocated by others, maxigation by small pleasure craft would be far from ideal, and during adverse conditions of wind and tidal currents would be hazardous, if not impossible, for sailing vessels.

23. In 1939, the Waterways Division of the Massachusetts Department of Public Works propared a plan for the improvement of Shirley Gut, consisting of a channel 1,300 foot long, 55 foot wide, and 8 foot doop at mean low water, with stone jetties at the outer end of the proposed channel. The estimated cost of this improvement was placed at \$108,900. Selection of this small channel cross-section was evidently influenced by a desire to avoid alterations to the sower siphen and other facilities which cross the Gut. It is believed, however, that such a channel in this location would be unsatisfactory for any type of navigation, even small pleasure eraft. A channel 12 feet deep and 100 feet wide would cost substantially more than the amount shown above, as the dredging quantities would be increased greatly ever these involved in the smaller project. Moreover, major revisions to the sewer siphen and other utility crossings would be required by a 12-feet channel, adding materially to the cost. Even if jetties were provided at the outer end of the desired channel,

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it is believed that there would be a continued tendency for the channel to shoal, requiring frequent and exponsive maintenance dredging.

24. Collatoral benefits which local interests expect to result from the opening of Shirloy Gut include a reduction in beach erosion, abatement of pollution, and protection against the contingent dangers involved in prison breaks. While these are highly desirable objectives, the extent to which they would be attained by the desired improvement, as well as their value, is largely a matter of conjecture. It seems apparent that these problems are local in character and their solution should, therefore, be left in the hands of the local agencies involved. On the other hand, it has been clearly indicated that the City of Besten and the Coast Artillery, United States Army, have sound reasons for wishing to retain the existing land connection between Door Island and the mainland. While the interests of these two groups could be adequately served by a bridge across the desired channel, this solution would add still more to the total cost of the project.

25. Although soveral statements were made at the hearing to the effect that the Town of Winthree and possibly some of the yachting organizations might be willing to make some contribution toward the cost of the desired improvement, no definite effect of cooperation was received. The Waterways Division of the Massachusetts Department of Public Works failed to make its usual favorable statement with reference to the recommendation of a contribution by the Commenwealth. It is significant to note that this agency specifically requested that its attitude toward the project be regarded as neutral.

26. Local interests agree that the desired channel would be suitable only for recreational craft, fishing boats, and other small vessels, but they maintain that the diversion of large numbers of vessels of this type from the main ship channels would relieve congestion therein and thus result in important general benefits to commercial navigation in Boston Harbor. As indicated in the foregoing discussion, it is believed that the suggested channel would attract a far smaller volume of traffic than that anticipated by its

sponsors and that, while some benefit to general navigation might result from the diversion of small-boat traffic through the Gut, it would not be of major importance.

27. Conclusions. - The district engineer is of the opinion that the prospective benefits to navigation creditable to a dredged channel in Shirley Gut would consist primarily of convenience and a small saving in operating costs to small fishing boats and recreational craft, particularly pleasure vessels traveling between Winthree and points north of Beston. The diversion of such vessels from the main ship channels of Beston Harber would constitute only a minor benefit to commercial navigation. Other benefits which local interests hope to attain by recopening Shirley Gut, such as pollution abatement and protection against the escape of prisoners from Deer Island, are regarded as matters which fall within the prevince of local authorities. The district engineer believes, therefore, that the prospective benefits creditable to the desired improvement would not be commensurate with the probable cost of the project and concludes that a survey of the locality is not warranted.

28. Recommondation. - The district engineer recommends that he survey of Shirley Gut, Boston Harber, Massachusetts, be made by the Federal Government at the present time.

L. R. Gallagher, Major, Corps of Engineers,

District Engineer

Inclosuro:
Map

